

Participation in Voluntary Associations: Relations with Resources, Personality, and Political Values

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Participation in voluntary associations is explained by different theories in sociology, psychology, and political science. Sociologists have emphasized the effects of resources such as human and social capital. Psychologists have demonstrated the role of empathy and extraversion as aspects of personality. Political scientists have considered political values and attitudes. This paper investigates the predictive value of personality characteristics, political values, and social conditions for civic engagement. Data from the Family Survey of the Dutch Population 2000 (n = 1,587) show that active citizens have more human and social capital available to them, they are more interested in politics, have more post materialistic value orientations, prefer leftist or Christian political parties, are less conscientious persons, and show more empathic concern with other people. Relations of personality characteristics with civic engagement were partly intermediated by church attendance and the level of education and varied in complex ways with hourly wages. My results show how social, political, and psychological characteristics are jointly related to civic engagement.

KEY WORDS: Civic engagement, personality, resources, volunteering, voluntary associations

Political scientists have studied participation of citizens in voluntary associations because it contributes to a healthy democracy (Almond & Verba, 1963; OECD, 2001; Putnam, 2000; Tocqueville, 1835/1961). Civic engagement has many forms and colors. Citizens participate in voluntary associations not only to advocate their interests in politics (Verba, Scholzman, & Brady, 1995), but also to find meaning in life, to express their social identity, to contribute to the well being of others, and to improve their chances on the labor market—among many other things (Clary et al., 1998). This paper empirically investigates the backgrounds of civic engagement in voluntary associations in the Netherlands from three different perspectives: from sociology, political science, and psychology.

Sociologists generally assume that good intentions are universal, but that some people have a stock of human and social capital that allows them to fulfill these intentions while others lack the resources to do so (Brady, Verba, & Schlozman, 1995; Wilson & Musick, 1999). "The desire to do good is more or less evenly distributed, but the resources to fulfill that desire are not" (Wilson & Musick, 1999, p. 244). This approach claims that resources in the form of financial, human, and social capital are driving civic engagement. The advantage of this approach is that the measurement and causality problems that inhere in preferences and values are avoided. However, it does not provide a complete picture of the determinants of civic engagement. Measurement problems with preferences are not a good reason to pretend they do not exist and are not important. Political scientists have been less hesitant to use attitudes and values as explanations of civic engagement. Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995) and Inglehart (1977, 1996) have shown that interest in politics and postmaterialism increase civic engagement. Personality and social psychologists, on the other hand, are interested in civic engagement, and especially in volunteering behaviors, as an expression of prosocial dispositions such as extraversion, agreeableness, and empathy (Carlo, Allen, & Buhman, 1999; Elshaug & Metzger, 2001; Penner & Finkelstein, 1998; Smith, 1966). Others have investigated the relationship of civic engagement to moral reasoning (Muhlberger, 2000), self-esteem, and locus of control (Cohen, Vigoda, & Samorly, 2001).

Sociologists, political scientists, and psychologists have studied civic engagement in relative isolation. Sociologists usually ignore potential effects of personality (for an exception, see Musick & Wilson, 2003). With a few exceptions (Penner, 2002; Penner & Finkelstein, 1998), personality and social psychologists have devoted little attention to the way these dispositions are intertwined with social conditions or political values. Political scientists have studied effects of resources in conjunction with political attitudes, showing that political attitudes often intermediate effects of resources (Cohen, Vigoda, & Samorly, 2001; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). In the present study, I consider the effects of "social," "political," and "psychological" characteristics on civic engagement simultaneously. I investigate to what extent "sociological" characteristics such as education, income, religious affiliation, and community size, "political" characteristics such as political attitudes and values, and "psychological" characteristics such as individual differences in personality characteristics are typical for citizens who are active in voluntary associations. I have added quotation marks to the labels "psychological," "sociological," and "political" to indicate that the distinctions between the disciplines are crude and ideal typical and should not be taken too strict. In fact, I argue that disciplinary boundaries narrow our vision on civic engagement: studies from different disciplinary perspectives are incomplete because they disregard the role of the variables that are part of the other discipline. This conclusion is based on two arguments that are supported by the data

presented below: (1) the relation of participation with social conditions is partly due to personality characteristics and (2) personality characteristics and social conditions have interactive effects. Sociologists and economists often downplay the role of preferences with the “low cost-hypothesis”: when choices involve higher opportunity costs, they are less likely to be value-based. My results do not give much support for this idea. Personality and political values are related to civic engagement, also to more costly forms of participation (such as volunteering), and also among persons with higher opportunity costs for participation (those with higher hourly wages). Considering the effects of social, political, and psychological characteristics jointly and in their interactions with each other gives us a fuller understanding of civic engagement.

Civic Engagement in the Netherlands

Several aspects of Dutch civil society make the Netherlands an interesting case for studying these issues. In contrast to popular images of dwindling civic engagement (e.g., Fukuyama, 1999; Putnam, 2000; see, however, Baer, Curtis, & Grabb, 2001; Paxton, 1999, for counterarguments), civic engagement in the Netherlands in the past two decades has not declined. However, the apparent stability of the general level of engagement in Dutch voluntary associations masks profound changes in the nature of participation (Dekker & Van den Broek, 1998). Since the cross-national study of Verba, Nie, and Kim (1978), the effect of religious participation on civic engagement in general and political activity in particular has declined, and the role of socioeconomic resources for civic engagement has increased (Bekkers & De Graaf, 2002). In addition, monetary contributions have increased strongly and a sizeable philanthropic sector has emerged (Bekkers, 2003). Taken together, patterns of civic engagement in the Netherlands have become more similar to those in the United States. Another reason why the present study may be interesting is that I investigate a broad range of social values and personality characteristics. It is widely believed that civic engagement in modern society is more often an expression of secular values and individual differences in personality (Dekker & Van den Broek, 1998). This makes it worthwhile to focus our attention on the role of political values and individual differences in personality for contemporary civic engagement.

The “Low Cost-Hypothesis”

Economists, sociologists, and psychologists argue that the behavioral effects of preferences, individual differences in personality, and prosocial motives are moderated by the costs of a given behavioral alternative (Diekmann & Preisendörfer, 2003; Mischel, 1977; Neuberg et al., 1997). This “low-cost hypothesis” claims that effects of personality characteristics on a given behavior are

assumed to be weaker when the costs associated with this behavior are higher. Recently, the low-cost hypothesis has gained popularity in European sociology as an explanation for anomalies to rational choice theory (Kirchgässner & Pommerhne, 1993; Mensch, 2000; Zintl, 1989). Voting, for example, is not considered as an anomaly to orthodox assumptions on self-interest because it involves small costs (see Tullock (1971) and Green & Shapiro (1994) for similar arguments). If the “low-cost hypothesis” is more than an ad hoc defense of rational choice theory, it should hold for more costly forms of civic engagement as well, such as volunteering. I investigate how the effects of personality characteristics depend on the costs of civic engagement in two ways: (1) by comparing the effects of personality characteristics on acts of participation with varying intensity (membership and volunteering); (2) by comparing the effects of personality characteristics on civic engagement among groups with varying opportunity costs of participation (in terms of hourly wages).

Data and Measures

The third edition of the family survey of the Dutch population (“Familie Enquete Nederlandse Bevolking,” De Graaf, De Graaf, Kraaykamp & Ultee, 2000; henceforth abbreviated as FNB2000) offers a unique opportunity to investigate the effects of sociological, political, and psychological characteristics of citizens on their civic engagement. This nationwide survey used a two-stage stratified sample of individuals in households. In the first stage, a random sample of municipalities in the Netherlands, stratified according to urbanization level, was drawn. In the second stage, a sample of persons was drawn from the population registers of these municipalities. Because the Family Survey was designed for research on families, an attempt was made to solicit participation from complete households (i.e., from both partners—if there were two adults). 723 primary respondents and their partners participated in the study. In addition, 141 persons without a partner (single person households) also participated. In total, 1,587 persons agreed to participate. The net response rate was 40.6%, which is not unusual for personal interviews in the Netherlands. Because the observations of primary respondents and their partners are not independent, a cluster correction was applied in order to avoid underestimation of the standard errors using the Huber/White/sandwich estimator of variance (Huber, 1967). The respondents completed a computer assisted personal interview (CAPI) as well as a write-in questionnaire left at the respondent’s home after the CAPI.

The dependent variables in the analyses reported below are the reports in the CAPI about membership and volunteering in 12 types of voluntary associations. The interviewer mentioned the types of association one by one and asked the respondents for each type whether they held a membership in such an association, and if so, whether they served as unpaid volunteer workers for the association. Volunteer work was defined as “organizing activities for the association

or helping in another way.” In a first analysis, I compare the characteristics of respondents who did not hold any memberships with members of (*quasi-*) *political associations* (political parties, labor unions, professional organizations, religious organizations, women’s organizations, advocacy groups, and environmental organizations), members of *nonpolitical associations* (sports clubs, hobby clubs, organizations providing human and social services, cultural expression groups, and organizations for parents in schools), and members of both types of voluntary associations. In a second analysis, I compare the characteristics of respondents who were not engaged in voluntary associations with citizens who perform unpaid *volunteer work* for an association and those who *hold membership(s)* but do not volunteer.

To measure resources identified by sociological theories as facilitating civic engagement, data were obtained on the *highest completed educational level* (ranging from 1 for primary school to 8 for postacademic degree), the *frequency of church attendance* (number of visits per year), *urbanization level* (five categories, reverse coded), *personal income per year* (sum of all sources of income; respondents who did not report any source of income at all were given the median value (€23,000); incomes above €300,000 were truncated), and *working hours per week* (truncated above 70 hours). Personal income was divided by the number of working hours to obtain a measure of *hourly wages*. From a sociological point of view, civic engagement should increase with the level of education and church attendance, while participation should decrease with the level of urbanization and higher hourly wages, the latter because they increase the opportunity costs for participation.

The write-in questionnaire contained the questions on attitudes, values, and personality characteristics, because they are more vulnerable to social desirability. The following political variables were used. *Postmaterialism* is a variable in five categories based on the rank ordering of two sets of four political goals (see De Graaf (1988) for original items). *Interest in politics* was measured by a single item: “My interest in politics is . . .” (from 1 for “very little” to 5 for “very much”). *Ideological self-identification* was measured with the item “When you think about your opinions in political matters, where would you place them on this line from left to right?” (ranging from 1 to 10). To obtain a variable measuring *extremity* of ideological self-identification, all responses were recoded into absolute deviations from the middle category. *Voting preferences* were measured with the question: “If there would be a general election today, which political party would you vote for?” From a political science point of view, it can be expected that respondents with postmaterialistic value orientations, more interest in politics, more extreme ideological self-identification, and specific political preferences (opposed to being undecided or having no intention to vote) should increase civic engagement.

To measure personality characteristics studied in psychological perspectives on prosocial behavior, the write-in questionnaire also contained a 30-item “Big Five”-adjective checklist (responses ranging from 1 for “Does not fit me at all”

to 7 for “Fits me completely”) based on Goldberg (1992). The “Big Five” are the much appraised result of several decades of controversy in personality psychology. Numerous factor analyses on tens of thousands of adjectives from the dictionary describing personal characteristics showed that most of the adjectives were related to five dimensions (John, 1990). Factor analysis on the adjective checklist clearly showed a five-factor structure. For all dimensions, mean scores were computed: *extraversion* (alpha = .82, four items), *neuroticism* (alpha = .77, four items; the antonym of “emotional stability”), *agreeableness* (alpha = .83, six items), *conscientiousness* (alpha = .87, four items), and *openness* (alpha = .80, six items). Because the literature on prosocial behavior suggests that empathy is an important facet of agreeableness (Ashton & Lee, 2001; Graziano & Eisenberg, 1994; Penner & Finkelstein, 1998), I translated items from Davis (1994) into Dutch to measure *empathic concern* (four items, alpha = .68) and *perspective taking* (six items, alpha = .78).

Analytical Strategy

In the following section, results are reported of two maximum-likelihood multinomial logistic regression analyses of civic engagement. Multinomial logistic regression models are suited to analyze dichotomous choices between qualitatively different alternatives (Cramer, 1991). In our case, there are two different choices: in which type of association to participate (political, nonpolitical, or both) and the intensity of participation (membership or volunteering). For both choices, nonparticipation is the reference category. The analyses show which characteristics are typical of participants in different types of voluntary associations, and which characteristics are typical of members and volunteers (compared with nonparticipants).

The entries in the tables are relative risk ratios (exp(b)s) or odds ratios. An odds ratio of 1.00 indicates there is no relationship; odds ratios below 1.00 indicate a negative relationship, and odds ratios above 1.00 indicate a positive relationship. All independent variables (except dummies for gender and political preferences) were z-standardized, which enables a comparison of effect sizes. In the first model, individual differences in empathy and the “Big 5”-personality dimensions are included. In the second model, individual resources such as education, social capital indicators such as church attendance, and political values and attitudes are added. Because personality characteristics are rather stable individual differences (Costa & McCrae, 1988), they are entered before acquired levels of education, income, and religious participation. The results of a third model, including the interaction effects of individual differences with hourly wages, are shown separately. This model allows for a test of the “low-cost hypothesis.”

Results

Resources, Political Values, and Personality Characteristics of Active Citizens

The results of the analyses reported in Tables 1 and 2 shed light on the resources, political values, and personality characteristics of active citizens in the Netherlands. In short, active citizens have more human and social capital available to them, they are more interested in politics, have more postmaterialistic value orientations, are more likely to prefer leftist or Christian political parties, are less conscientious, and show more empathic concern for other people than passive citizens.

Resources. A higher level of education is the most important resource promoting active citizenship: the level of education is positively related to all forms of participation investigated in this article. The old observation that civic engage-

Table 1. Multinomial Logistic Regression Analysis of Membership of Voluntary Associations

	Non-political		(Quasi-)Political		Both	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
Female	0.50***	0.54***	0.41***	0.44***	0.46***	0.50***
Age	0.74***	0.79*	1.34***	1.33*	1.31***	1.54***
Openness	1.30*	1.20(*)	1.13	1.00	1.14(*)	1.04
Conscientiousness	0.87(*)	0.94	0.81*	0.83(*)	0.75***	0.80*
Extraversion	1.02	1.09	1.14	1.15	1.13(*)	1.15(*)
Agreeableness	0.93	1.01	0.79*	0.90	0.92	1.03
Neuroticism	0.89	0.92	0.95	1.01	0.84*	0.93
Empathic concern	1.20*	1.19(*)	1.44***	1.36***	1.31***	1.28**
Perspective taking	0.89	0.82*	1.02	0.99	1.01	0.90
Level of education		1.43***		1.37**		1.91***
Hourly wages		0.92		1.05		1.17
Church attendance		1.13		1.27*		1.30*
Urbanization level		1.04		0.98		0.88
Postmaterialism		1.09		1.30**		1.21*
Political preference		1.29		3.20**		3.48**
Left		1.36		2.31(*)		2.08(*)
Right		1.24		3.35*		3.88**
(ref: non-Christian voter)		1.00		1.21		2.87
Other		0.99		1.73		2.17(*)
Undecided		1.03		1.05		1.01
Attitude extremity		1.02		1.23*		1.03
Political interest						

Source: FNB2000 (n = 1,283).

***p < .001; **p < .01; *p < .05; (*)p < .10 (two-tailed). Reference category: no membership.

Entries are relative risk ratios for z-standardized variables. Odds ratios below 1.00 indicate a negative relationship; odds ratios above 1.00 indicate a positive relationship.

Pseudo R² for model 1: .0446; model 2: .0830.

Table 2. Multinomial Logistic Regression Analysis of Level of Engagement

	Membership		Volunteering	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
Female	0.49***	0.55***	0.40***	0.42***
Age	1.11	1.14	1.27**	1.35**
Openness	1.11	1.00	1.22**	1.11
Conscientiousness	0.81**	0.87(*)	0.82*	0.88
Extraversion	1.05	1.04	1.21*	1.25*
Agreeableness	0.92	1.05	0.92	1.03
Neuroticism	0.93	1.00	0.87(*)	0.93
Empathic concern	1.24**	1.20*	1.30***	1.27**
Perspective taking	1.00	0.93	0.95	0.87
Level of education		1.41***		1.61***
Hourly wages		1.14		1.03
Church attendance		1.19(*)		1.24*
Urbanization level		1.06		0.86(*)
Postmaterialism		1.15(*)		1.18(*)
Political preference		2.06*		2.32*
Left				
Right		1.63		1.92
(ref: non-Christian voter)		1.52		3.60**
Other		0.93		2.87
Undecided		1.03		2.08(*)
Attitude extremity		1.06		0.95
Political interest		1.04		1.26*

Source: FNB2000 (n = 1,283).

***p < .001; **p < .01; *p < .05; (*)p < .10 (two-tailed). Reference category: no participation in voluntary associations. Entries are relative risk ratios for z-standardized variables. Odds ratios below 1.00 indicate a negative relationship; odds ratios above 1.00 indicate a positive relationship. Pseudo R² for model 1: .0313; model 2: .0739.

ment is unequally distributed (Almond & Verba, 1963) still holds. Those with more human capital are more likely to participate in voluntary associations. A lack of human capital is a barrier for civic engagement.

Hourly wages did not show any substantial relations to membership and volunteering (and neither did income or working hours, the ratio of which was the measure for hourly wages; results not shown). This result is not in line with economic models of volunteering (Freeman, 1997): those with a high value of time face higher opportunity costs and should be less likely to volunteer. However, the results show that higher wages do not inhibit civic engagement. An explanation for this anomaly can be found in the mobilization strategies of voluntary associations. The civic voluntarism model suggests that those with higher wages are more attractive as members of voluntary associations and are therefore more likely to be asked (Brady, Schlozman, & Verba, 1999).

Church attendance was positively related to voluntary association membership, especially with political membership and multiple membership. In the past, church attendance used to be strongly correlated with membership and volunteering (Verba, Nie, & Kim, 1978, pp. 182–192). In the process of depillarization and secularization that took place in Dutch society since the 1960s, the effects of church attendance have declined (Bekkers & De Graaf, 2002). The United States shows hardly any sign of secularization, and, consequently, religious affiliation is still one of the key factors for civic engagement (Uslaner, 2002). Another indicator of social capital, the level of urbanization, was only weakly related to volunteering and combined membership. This result suggests that the difference between rural and urban environments in the Netherlands that was present 25 years ago (Verba, Nie, & Kim, 1978) has declined and that urban-rural differences in the Netherlands are smaller than in the United States (Oliver, 2001; Putnam, 2000).

Political characteristics. Political values and attitudes showed clear relationships with civic engagement. Of course, the effects of political values and attitudes were more pronounced on political membership, but several political characteristics also had effects on combined membership and on volunteering. Citizens with a greater interest in politics and postmaterialistic value orientations were more likely to be members of voluntary associations and were more likely to volunteer for an association. Postmaterialism and political interest intermediated a part of the relation of the level of education with civic engagement: regression models without postmaterialism and political interest showed a markedly stronger effect of the level of education. Other studies show that the increase of the mean level of education and the rise of postmaterialism have compensated for the negative effects of the decline of religion on civic engagement after World War II. Despite a massive secularization, lowering the proportion of church members from 98% in 1900 to 45% in 2000, Dutch citizens are engaged in even more voluntary associations than they were at the peaks of the pillarized era that ended in the 1960s (Bekkers & De Graaf, 2002; Burger & Veldheer, 2001). Voting preferences were also related to civic engagement. Nonvoters were less likely to be members and volunteers than citizens with a preference for a leftist or Christian political party. Controlling for voting preferences, attitude extremity was not related to civic engagement in the expected manner: those with politically more extremist opinions were not more likely to be engaged in voluntary associations.

Psychological characteristics. It is rather difficult to give a “one size fits all” characterization of the personality of active citizens. In social and personality psychology, volunteering is often studied as an example of prosocial behavior (Penner, 2002; Penner & Finkelstein, 1998) and agreeableness, empathy, perspective taking, and extraversion are usually considered to be prosocial dispositions fostering prosocial behavior (Allen & Rushton, 1983; Graziano & Eisenberg, 1994; Penner & Finkelstein, 1998). The results of the analyses show a less consistent picture. Empathic concern for other people emerges as the most typical

characteristic of citizens who are actively participating in voluntary associations. The positive relationship of empathic concern with civic engagement is in line with several other studies, for instance on volunteerism (Penner, 2002; Penner & Finkelstein, 1998), political activism (Hoffman, 1986), and other examples of prosocial behavior (Eisenberg et al., 1989). A second personality characteristic that seems typical of citizens actively engaged in voluntary associations is a lower level of conscientiousness. Apparently, less orderly and systematic persons are more likely to participate in voluntary associations than their more conscientious counterparts. This result is rather surprising. In descriptions of the “Big Five,” conscientiousness is often related to proactive behavior, a stronger will to achieve, high self-esteem, and impulse control (McCrae & John, 1992). Although these qualities seem to be valuable for citizens who want to participate in voluntary associations, conscientiousness actually decreases civic engagement. Unfortunately, conscientiousness has rarely been studied in the literature on civic engagement and prosocial behavior. Perhaps conscientiousness indicates dogmatism and inflexibility, which Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswick, Levinson, & Sanford (1950) suggested as sources of “the authoritarian personality.” Although conscientiousness shows a weakly positive correlation ($r = .15$) with a scale consisting of conservative attitudes in politics (“unemployment benefits are too high”) and pro-life attitudes (“the law is too easy on abortion”), the relation of conscientiousness with civic engagement does not decrease when conservative attitudes are taken into account. Future research should investigate the negative relationship between conscientiousness and civic engagement.

The other personality characteristics often have different effects for different forms of civic engagement. Openness to experience was typical of citizens participating in nonpolitical associations. This result is due to the relationship between openness and participation in cultural and expressive organizations, such as dancing, theatre, and musical groups (Bekkers & De Graaf, 2002). Extraversion was typical of volunteers and showed a somewhat weaker positive relationship with membership. This result is in line with previous research (Smith, 1966; Lindeman, 1995). Emotional stability was typical of citizens holding multiple memberships. This result is in line with research that documented a negative relationship between depression and civic engagement (Lin, 2001; Musick & Wilson, 2003). Finally, agreeableness was atypical of political activists, even when empathic concern was not included in the regression model. This result is surprising, because agreeableness is positively related to empathic concern, and empathic concern is positively related to civic engagement. Previous research (Elschaug & Metzger, 2001) found that agreeableness was typical of specific groups of volunteers. The results above indicate that agreeableness is not typical of all volunteers and that political idealists are not nice people in daily life. Additional analyses (not shown) indicate that the combination of high empathic concern and low agreeableness is typical of citizens with a more left wing political preference.

How Resources Intermediate Effects of Personality Characteristics

A comparison of the two regression models in Tables 1 and 2 shows that sociodemographic characteristics intermediate a large number of relationships of personality characteristics with civic engagement. Detailed analyses (available from the author upon request) entering sociodemographic characteristics one by one show that the effects of different personality characteristics are intermediated by different social conditions. The positive relationship of openness with nonpolitical participation weakens considerably when the level of education is introduced. This result is in line with the conceptualization of openness as “intellect” (McCrae & John, 1992). The negative relationship of agreeableness with (quasi) political participation disappears when left-wing voting preferences, interest in politics, and postmaterialism are taken into account, suggesting that progressive idealists are concerned for others but less agreeable persons. The negative relationship of neuroticism with holding both types of memberships disappears when the level of education is controlled. This result suggests that emotional stability (the antonym of neuroticism) is a useful trait in acquiring a higher level of education as well as in voluntary associations. The analysis of the intensity of engagement also shows that the level of education intermediates the positive relationship of openness and emotional stability with volunteering.

How Effects of Personality Characteristics Vary with Opportunity Costs

To test the “low-cost hypothesis” that effects of personality characteristics are smaller when the opportunity costs of participation are higher, Table 3 shows how the effects of personality characteristics on membership type and intensity of engagement vary with hourly wages. For respondents with high hourly wages, participation in voluntary associations is a high-cost activity, while for respondents with lower wages, participation is low-cost. The low-cost hypothesis predicts that the relationships of personality characteristics with civic engagement are weaker for those with lower wages. In the analyses, the interaction terms of personality characteristics with hourly wages should have negative effects (odds ratios below 1.00).

However, the results in Table 3 do not give equivocal support for the low-cost hypothesis. In line with the low-cost hypothesis, conscientiousness and agreeableness are less predictive of civic engagement at higher wage levels. Agreeable and conscientious persons are less likely to participate as they earn more. However, in contrast to the low-cost hypothesis, extraversion, emotional stability, and perspective taking are more characteristic of active citizens with higher wage levels. Among citizens with high-opportunity costs for participation, less neurotic persons are more likely to hold memberships in all types of associations, and they are more likely to volunteer; those with higher perspective taking abilities are more likely to volunteer and to hold multiple memberships; and more

Table 3. Multinomial Logistic Regression Analyses of Membership Type and Intensity of Engagement Including Interactions of Personality Characteristics with Hourly Wages

	Membership type			Intensity of engagement	
	Non-political	(Quasi-)political	Both types	Membership	Volunteering
Openness	1.15	1.00	1.05	0.97	1.11
Conscientiousness	0.99	0.85	0.86	0.93	0.86
Extraversion	1.02	1.15	1.16	1.02	1.22*
Agreeableness	0.96	0.83	0.93	0.96	0.95
Neuroticism	0.83(*)	0.95	0.90	0.93	0.89
Empathic concern	1.19(*)	1.37***	1.30**	1.23*	1.29**
Perspective taking	0.83(*)	1.04	0.95	0.98	0.91
Hourly wages (w)	0.71	1.31	1.60*	1.38	1.25
W × openness	1.07	0.95	0.93	1.00	0.94
W × conscientiousness	0.84*	0.88(*)	0.83*	0.82**	0.94
W × extraversion	1.17*	1.04	1.04	1.07	1.10
W × agreeableness	0.76	0.46**	0.53*	0.55*	0.48**
W × neuroticism	1.30***	1.19*	1.14*	1.20**	1.15*
W × empathic concern	1.01	1.11	0.99	1.16	0.97
W × perspective taking	1.04	1.25	1.38*	1.37*	1.41*

Source: FNB2000 (n = 1,283).

***p < .001; **p < .01; *p < .05; (*)p < .10 (two-tailed).

Entries are relative risk ratios for z-standardized variables. Odds ratios below 1.00 indicate a negative relationship; odds ratios above 1.00 indicate a positive relationship.

Effects of age, gender, resources, and political attitudes are not shown because they did not change substantially.

Pseudo R²-Square for analysis of membership type: .0969; for intensity of engagement: .0877.

extraverted persons are more likely to hold nonpolitical memberships as the opportunity costs for participation are higher.

The results in Table 2 provide another test of the “low-cost hypothesis.” Because volunteering requires a sacrifice of time, and sheer membership does not, membership should be more strongly related to personality characteristics and political values than volunteering. However, the results clearly show a different pattern. Model 1 shows that volunteering is significantly related to four personality characteristics (openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, and empathic concern), while membership is related to only two of these characteristics (conscientiousness and empathic concern). Model 2 shows that volunteering is also more strongly related to political values than membership.

Discussion and Conclusion

In this paper, three perspectives on civic engagement were brought together in an analysis of participation in voluntary associations in the Netherlands: the resource perspective from sociology, the political values perspective from politi-

cal science, and the personality perspective from psychology. The most distinctive characteristics of active citizens are their greater access to human and social capital, as well as their political preferences and attitudes. Civic engagement increases with the level of education, religiosity, interest in politics, and postmaterialistic value orientation and is higher among citizens living in rural areas and among citizens preferring left-wing or Christian political parties. Personality characteristics often have different effects for different forms of civic engagement. The most typical personality characteristic of active citizens is their higher level of empathic concern. The results suggest that a strictly psychological perspective on civic engagement is far from complete because it lacks the most important predictors. This is not to say that personality can be ignored because it is irrelevant. Taking account of individual differences in personality enables the researcher to understand civic engagement more fully, especially the choice among different types of voluntary associations.

The analyses provide two additional arguments why it is important to consider personality characteristics in the analysis of civic engagement. The first argument is that the effects of so-called “sociological” factors like educational attainment and church attendance are partly mediating the effects of individual differences in empathic concern and neuroticism. Education and church attendance partly intermediated effects of five out of seven personality characteristics on civic engagement. Effects of agreeableness, conscientiousness, openness, neuroticism, and empathic concern all declined when “sociological” and “political” characteristics were taken into account. The second argument is that the effects of personality and social conditions are not simply additive. This paper investigated whether effects of personality characteristics on civic engagement vary with the costs of participation. The “low-cost hypothesis” suggests that effects of personality characteristics and other “soft incentives” decline with increasing costs of participation. However, the results do not give much support for this hypothesis. While agreeableness and conscientiousness are less characteristic of citizens with higher opportunity costs for participation who are engaged in voluntary associations, extraversion, perspective taking, and emotional stability are more characteristic of those citizens. These results cannot easily be reconciled with the low-cost hypothesis. The anomalies can be explained by the argument that the effects of personality characteristics also depend on the benefits of participation. High costs for participation may be compensated by high benefits. Participation in voluntary associations may be a more satisfying activity for persons with higher levels of extraversion, emotional stability, and perspective taking. However, this rather speculative hypothesis needs further testing.

In any case, a closer cooperation between sociology, psychology, and political science is needed to discover when and how individual differences in personality are related to prosocial behavior in general and to civic engagement in particular. Future work should develop and test alternative hypotheses, paying more attention to how different social contexts may activate different personality

characteristics, and how individual differences in personality lead to the selection of situations matching these personality characteristics (Buss, 1987). For instance, the finding that church attendance intermediated the effect of empathy in several analyses may indicate that religious meetings are more attractive to empathic persons. Another intriguing finding was that political preferences intermediated effects of personality characteristics on civic engagement, suggesting that voters with different political orientations have different personality characteristics. These topics call for further research. Social and political characteristics interact with and intermediate the effects of individual differences in personality on civic engagement. We are only at the start of understanding this complex pattern of interrelations between social structure, personality, and social and political outcomes.

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